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How to Save Hundreds of Dollars on Funeral Expenses

SEATTLE, WA— With the unemployment rates still on the rise and household incomes decreasing, access to affordable funeral services is more important than ever.

A comprehensive survey of funeral home prices in Washington State shows that a family can save hundreds to thousands of dollars on funeral services by simply shopping around. In fact, prices may be as much as seven times more expensive at one funeral establishment over another. With the coronavirus pandemic, the need to have cremation and burial pricing available to consumers online is increasingly apparent.

In the summer of 2020, **People's Memorial Association** (PMA) conducted its own survey of Washington State funeral home pricing. Washington State funeral homes are leading the nation in this increase of transparency, with 51 percent of funeral homes including at least partial pricing on their websites. This has climbed up from 38 percent in 2018 and 27 percent in 2016.

The PMA staff and volunteers requested General Price Lists (GPLs) from all of the Washington State funeral homes that handled 25 or more cases in 2019. Due to the pandemic, they only collected the pricing via the funeral homes' websites or the GPL the funeral home submitted. This survey is based on those 200 responding funeral homes. Only 12 funeral homes didn't provide pricing (they either require a personal visit or didn't respond to their emails or phone calls) versus 31 in 2018.

The 2020 survey discovered:

- Cremation prices vary by more than 745 percent.
- The average cost for direct cremation in the state is \$1,570, with a range from \$495 to \$4,165.
- Burial prices vary by over 400 percent.
- The average price of immediate burial is \$2,924, with prices ranging from \$1,045 to \$5,290.
- A complete funeral service with embalming, viewing, and a funeral service averages \$5,071 (as low as \$2,045 and as high as \$11,100). Basic casket costs were included in both burial options, but caskets can range from less than \$1,000 to over \$25,000, depending on a family's preference.

PMA produces the biennial price survey to educate consumers about their options and the cost of different choices. Individuals wishing to have a copy of the price

survey may view and/or download it from the People's Memorial Association website at peoplesmemorial.org/pricesurvey or contact the office at info@peoplesmemorial.org to request that a copy be mailed.

This year, PMA also has included links in the digital survey to online reviews for funeral homes if people have shared their experiences. While cost is, of course, a huge factor, the service quality and reputation of a funeral home should also be taken into consideration when shopping for a funeral.

Alongside the national organizations Funeral Consumers Alliance and Consumer Federation of America, PMA has lobbied the Federal Trade Commission to update The Funeral Rule from 1984. This update would require that all funeral homes post their General Price Lists on their websites and email it when requested. Currently, pricing is only required to be provided when someone walks into a funeral establishment.

In addition to conducting these comprehensive price comparisons, PMA provides free classes on end-of-life planning. Class topics include estate planning, advance planning for healthcare, information about both green and conventional funeral options, as well as their costs. Attendees receive supporting legal and planning documents to complete their own end-of-life plan. Since March 2020, there has been a 280 percent increase in class attendance, largely due to the ease of accessibility and the reminder of human mortality brought on by COVID-19. PMA promotes that with a little bit of planning before death, unnecessary stress and thousands of dollars can be saved. For the virtual class schedule, visit www.peoplesmemorial.org/events.

People's Memorial Association is the only nonprofit organization focused on funeral education and advocacy in Washington State. Members of PMA receive discounted prices on cremation, burial, aquamation, and natural organic reduction services at more than 20 funeral establishments across the state. A lifetime membership is a one-time fee of \$50. The approximately 70,000 living members also share ownership of The Co-op Funeral Home of People's Memorial - a full-service mortuary that serves the King County area. Visit www.peoplesmemorial.org and www.funerals.coop for more information.



Powerhouse Marketing with Welton

By Welton Hong

The Case for Paid Search

Many people see Search Engine Marketing (SEM) as the "lesser" sibling of search engine optimization. The reality is the two are equally important to your deathcare marketing campaigns.

Before moving on to the stats and facts that prove the value of paid search, let's first ensure everyone understands what these two strategies are and why some people unfairly look down their noses at SEM.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) refers to your business website appearing organically in the search engines. That means you don't pay specifically for the link that shows up on Google.

Instead, you concentrate on writing great on-page content, developing backlinks and citations, and engaging in strong keyword research. The goal is to "persuade" Google your page is a top resource about a certain topic. That way the search engine offers your link when someone searches with related keywords.

SEM refers to paid ads that help ensure your website appears on Search Engine Results Pages (SERPs). The basic idea is that you set some parameters for your target audience and what keywords you're interested in showing up for. You also set a budget and then ad-bidding software places bids for you. Win the bid, and you show up in search results for a specific query.

One of the reasons people look askance at SEM is that they believe the entire purpose of a search is for Google or other engines to do the legwork to deliver best results to users. If advertisers are paying into that mix, won't that dilute the value of search results and ranking?

Actually, it doesn't. Check out these seven stats and facts for a better understanding of how paid search provides value to users and businesses such as your funeral home or cremation services firm:

1. Paid ads drive higher conversion rates.

Someone clicking on a paid search link is more likely to convert than someone who clicks on an organic link. In some cases, the difference can be a 50 percent greater chance of conversion from paid traffic.

A potential reason for this fact is paid ads might be even more targeted to the person than organic search results. If you search "preplan funeral" on Google, the organic results are ranked by relevance to your search and potentially your geo location.

But the paid results can account for other demographics and behavioral metrics, such as whether or not you've visited certain cremation websites or your income level.

Because the ad links might be more targeted, there's a better chance they attract someone who is seriously considering making a purchase or contacting a funeral home for more information.

2. Most marketers stand behind PPC.

PPC stands for pay-per-click advertising. Search ads are typically PPC, and close to 80 percent of online marketers believe this type of advertising has a huge benefit for their businesses.

Those benefits are experienced by organizations of every size and type. About 65 percent of all Small and Midsize Businesses (SMBs) keep a PPC ad campaign running most of the time.

3. Businesses are likely to neglect their ads.

If you have given PPC a go without good results, you might not be keeping close enough tabs on your campaigns. More than 70 percent of all businesses that engage in online advertising ignore their campaigns for a month or more.

Paid search can be lucrative, but it doesn't always produce results without some work from you, your employees, or someone managing the campaigns on your behalf.

4. Not everyone hates ads.

Another reason people give SEM the side eye is that they perceive it to be annoying to consumers. They buy into the fact that ads alienate potential clientele, perhaps ensuring that people won't click on your organic links, either.

This might be true if you're running spammy display ads and banner campaigns that interfere with someone's ability to interact with websites.

But paid search isn't typically considered annoying. Many people don't even notice the difference between organic and paid search results, and those who do can easily decide to click organic links without any inconvenience if they don't want to interact with ads.

It's also important to realize that many consumers don't hate all ads. They're willing to see and engage with ads that are relevant to them. Globally, only approximately a quarter of internet users run ad blockers, so it's not a big concern.

5. People click on the most relevant ads.

However, it is best practice to keep your ads and campaigns as relevant as possible. Relevant ads are least likely to alienate consumers. Relevant ads are also most likely to garner clicks and result in conversions.

When asked why they click ads on SERPs, a third said they do so most often when the ad appears to directly answer their query.

6. Google ads can drive huge returns.

Google ads can be powerful. Outside of paid search, Google's ad network covers nearly 90 percent of the internet. Google is also a member of the Acceptable Ads program, which can help reduce the impact of ad blockers on your content — especially when it comes to paid search.

Pair all that with the fact that every \$1.60 spent on Google ads generates an average return of \$8 and you can see how SEM might be a winner. That's a 400 percent ROI!

7. Paid ads generate more clicks than organic search.

One reason SEM return on investment is so high might be because paid ads get more clicks than organic search by a big margin. Approximately 65 percent of people who are searching with commercial intent click an ad over an organic link.

Commercial intent means the keywords a person uses indicate a high likelihood he or she is planning to make a purchase or act soon. In the case of funeral homes and other cremation providers, keywords with commercial intent might include "cost of cremation," "cost of burial," "local cremation providers," "funeral services," or "how to preplan my cremation."

While not everyone who enters those queries will make a purchase, most people searching for those things are at least interested in doing so at some point.

The takeaway here is this: Organic search isn't the only way deathcare firms can reach potential clientele online. And if SEO is the only game you're playing when it comes to online marketing, you're leaving a lot on the table.

Welton Hong is the founder of Ring Ring Marketing® and a leading expert in creating case generation from online to the phone line. He is the author of *Making Your Phone Ring with Internet Marketing for Funeral Homes*. For more information, visit www.FuneralHomeProfits.com.

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